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Dead Creek area to be fenced off

By J.G. MATY
Of the News-Democrat

The cleanup of hazardous materials from Dead Creek in Cahokia remains uncertain, but federal officials will soon take some action to prevent the wastes from hurting people.

The creek near Illinois 3 in Cahokia, which gave area residents the jitters with eerie smoldering and glowing in 1980, is to be fenced off soon by the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

A six-foot chain-link fence topped with three strands of barbed wire will be placed along both sides of the creek between Queen Avenue on the north and Judith Lane on the south, said Mike O'Toole, an environmental engineer with the EPA Region 5 office in Chicago.

The fence will replace a deteriorating wooden picket fence placed along the creek in 1980. The picket fence has been knocked down in places and parts of it have been stolen, O'Toole said.

Hopefully the fence will prevent anyone, particularly children, from coming into contact with PCBs and other chemicals in the creek, he said.

"At one time it was a haven for kids.

'The problem with Dead Creek is such that it is not a problem unless you go traipsing through it and go rolling around it or put your hand into your mouth after fishing around in the creek. Even then, you may not get any ill effects.'

— Mike O'Toole, EPA engineer

That's the type of thing we wanted to prevent.

"The problem with Dead Creek is such that it is not a problem unless you go traipsing through it and go rolling around it or put your hand into your mouth after fishing around in the creek," O'Toole said. "Even then, you may not get any ill effects."

The creek last week was passed over for immediate consideration for emergency federal clean-up funds. Two hazardous waste sites in northern Illinois and one in southeastern Illinois are in line for those funds, available through the federal EPA's "superfund" for waste dump action.

Dead Creek and wastes buried in a

Monsanto Chemical Co. landfill about one mile away near the Mississippi River will be considered again in the fall for superfund action, O'Toole said. The two sites are believed to be the most serious hazardous waste problems in the metro-east area.

The Monsanto landfill, thought to be the source of dioxins and other chemicals seeping into the Mississippi, is the target of a state lawsuit against the chemical company. Monsanto has halted discussions with federal officials about the site since the suit was filed, O'Toole said.

"When they were sued, Monsanto said, 'We really have got to deal with this lawsuit first,'" O'Toole said. After the suit was filed

June 15, discussions with Monsanto "kind of ground to a halt. They're rolling up their sleeves and preparing for a fight."

But the situation may not slow clean-up efforts, O'Toole said. Federal officials can clean up wastes and try to force Monsanto to pay for the costs later.

The two waste dumps will be judged along with about 30 other wastes sites around the state for superfund help later this year, he said. Included on the list of superfund hopefuls, compiled by the state EPA, are dump sites near Collinsville, Fairmont City, and in an unincorporated area between East St. Louis and Sauget. All were passed over last week.

A state environmental official expressed surprise that the dump site between Sauget and East St. Louis had been included in the superfund request list, because the property owner has agreed to clean up the wastes.

Kenneth Mensing of the Illinois EPA's Collinsville office said the Southern Railroad has agreed to remove up to 100 barrels of solidified paint wastes from an area near the Mississippi. The wastes are to be removed when the level of the Mississippi drops, he said.

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